



Health Committee

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Advancing Gender Equity Position Statement

By: Health Committee

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Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation relating to increasing gender equity in Iowa.

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa's youth, that gender equity be advanced in Iowa to improve the health and safety of Iowans. Those topics include menstrual equity, gay conversion therapy, and protecting all intersex rights.

Rationale

Every year, millions of students do not have access to proper sanitary menstrual products. Studies have shown that 20% of biological females miss school due to the lack of menstrual products. In low-income public schools, this is an imminent problem. Students who come from low-income households that cannot afford proper menstrual products do not have access to safe, sanitary products. There are also health risks that come with inadequate access to menstrual products. Wearing a tampon more than the 8-hour time limit can cause one to develop an irritation or infection, including the life-threatening complication of Toxic Shock Syndrome. Students are also using unsanitary items such as toilet paper in lieu of these products, which puts them at a higher risk of infection. Other states are moving towards improving menstrual product access in public schools, including California, Illinois, New Hampshire, and New York. It is time that menstrual products are provided in schools, exactly how toilet paper is provided.

Conversion therapy is the practice of attempting to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity through psychological torture, including shaming, hypnosis, electric shocking, and induced vomiting. These techniques have not proven to only be ineffective but also dangerous. They have also been proven to lead to higher rates of substance abuse, depression, and suicide. Youth exposed to conversion therapy are 8 times more likely to commit suicide and 6 times more likely to report clinical levels of depression. Sixteen states have already implemented legislation similar to this. One of those states is Illinois, which bans conversion therapy via the Youth Mental Health Protection Act, enacted in May of 2015. This bans health providers and counselors from referring patients to conversion therapy or administering it themselves. Furthermore, Iowa Safe Schools is leading an effort to ban this practice, which is cruel and misaligned with modern society. The fact that this practice is still allowed shows that there is a negative stigma towards the LGBTQ+ community. Conversion therapy is state sponsored discrimination and allows the government to sanction an inherent human rights violation against the LGBTQ+ community.

Intersex refers to people with variations in their reproductive and sexual anatomy that differ from what's traditionally male or female. 1 in 1,500 new births are intersex births. "Since the 1960s, many doctors

have performed medically unnecessary gender reassignment surgery on intersex youth; this process is a form of involuntary genital mutilation. Intersex youth are subjected to these invasive medical procedures without their informed consent. The unnecessary and non-consensual procedures can result in permanent sterilization, contributing to lifelong emotional trauma in many instances.” (Iowa Safe Schools) Although Iowa has made significant strides in Intersex right protections, not all invasive procedures have been banned. Thus, it is important that the rights of Intersex people are upheld in all instances in the state of Iowa.

Funding

Currently it is a requirement for Iowa Public School Boards to ensure toilet paper in public schools, this budget should include menstrual products, as they too are a necessity for students. In the 2017-2018 school year, An estimated 48.6% of enrolled students were biologically female. This means that this proposal would benefit 123,520 eligible students. Using a separate estimate previously obtained from the Department of Revenue, an annual supply of menstrual products costs \$48. Since school is not necessarily available to students all year, or through the weekends, it is assumed that students might use this supply for roughly half their needs (\$23). With the estimates we currently obtained, the annual costs to school districts throughout Iowa, for supplying menstrual products for free is estimated at \$2.8 million.

Recommended Action

SIYAC supports legislative appropriations to advance the level of gender equity in Iowa. For that to take place, public schools should provide menstrual products for free in bathrooms at schools with grades 6-12. Menstrual products include tampons and pads. Second, conversion therapy should be declared as illegal in the State of Iowa along with declaring that conversion therapy administered to minors is considered child abuse, and thus punishable in the same way. Finally, all invasive Intersex rights procedures should be banned and the rights of Intersex people should continue to be upheld in the state of Iowa.

The State of Iowa has an obligation to the future of our state to do all that is necessary to ensure all people in Iowa have access to a safe environment along with ensuring a healthy population.

Regards,

Health Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

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